

The Empty Nest Years: A Time of New Beginnings

Your children are grown and gone. After years of wiping running noses and ferrying kids to after-school practices and recitals, you finally have time for yourself. Why, then, do you feel so depressed and lost? Many parents experience an extreme sense of loneliness and purposelessness when their children leave home. Known as "empty nest syndrome," it is most common in women, but it can also affect men. Though difficult for many, this season of life can be one of life's most rewarding when you recognize the many opportunities it presents.

Revitalize Your Marriage

The years after the children leave home are an ideal time to rekindle your relationship with your spouse. David and Claudia Arp, authors of *Second Half of Marriage*, offer practical tips for making this season the happiest time of your lives as a couple.^[1] In their book, they reveal eight common problems facing couples and offer solid advice for overcoming them, including letting go of past marital disappointments and unrealistic expectations, maintaining effective communication, building a deeper friendship with your spouse, and rekindling romance in your marriage.

Good marriages take work, and this season is no different. But, with a little time and effort, you can revitalize your marriage and experience a wealth of satisfaction as a couple.

Release and Reconnect With Your Children

The phrase, "Once a parent, always a parent," is true. The children may be grown, but you will always be their parents. Done right, these years can be rich and rewarding as you redefine your relationship with your adult children.

When the children leave home, it is time to release and reconnect--release them into God's hands, trusting that the years you have invested in teaching and training them will influence their choices and decisions, and reconnect with them as adults. Your role shifts from directing their everyday choices and actions to supporting them, offering advice and counsel without trying to control them.

As your relationship with your grown children takes shape, you might be surprised at the joy and comfort this newfound level of friendship brings. Beth, a single parent whose only child is now grown, recently spent the day touring a city's art museums with her son. "I saw my son with new eyes today," Beth explained. "And I like what I see! He's bright, well spoken, and funny. We really bonded!"

Reignite Your Faith

The empty nest years also provide opportunities for spiritual introspection, assessing your walk with the Lord, spending more time in prayer and

Bible study, and growing together in faith with your spouse. The years after a child leaves home can be the most spiritually rewarding years of your life as you look for new ways to serve and minister in your church and community.

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~~One woman I know went back to school to pursue a master's degree in counseling after her children left home. A Bible teacher for years, she~~ feels a call to return to her home church after graduation and offer her counseling services at a reduced rate to women who are hurting. Another woman launched a successful freelance writing career, sharing God's Word and truth through the written word. Others embark on short-term missions trips, while less adventurous types serve as mentors in their home church. The possibilities are endless, limited only by your imagination and talents.

Faced with an empty-nest, parents often face feelings of loneliness, depression, and loss. Yet, in Christ, these years can be rich, fulfilling, and satisfying as parents yield to the Lord and seek His plan for this season of their lives.

The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, "The Lord is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him" (Psalm 92:12–15, NIV (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps%2092.12%E2%80%9315>)).

Mary J. Yerkes is an award-winning freelance writer. Her published work appears in books, magazines, ezines, devotionals, and newsletters. A member of Manassas Assembly of God in Bristow, Virginia, Mary serves on the Women's Ministries Board and teaches a weekly women's Bible study where she is passionate about applying God's never-changing Word to today's ever-changing culture. To learn more about Mary, visit www.maryyerkes.com.

[1] David and Claudia Arp, *Second Half of Marriage* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997). Readers can find this book at most Christian bookstores.

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